

ReTRAC Review

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RENO'S URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY 101

Unearthing Reno's Past from the Trenches



Looking at the corner of Center Street and Commercial Row in downtown Reno today, it's hard to imagine that a blazing wall of fire gutted the entire block - twice. In fact, most of the town was leveled by two fires in 1873 and 1879.

The significance? The City of Reno's ReTRAC Project (Reno Railroad Corridor) has uncovered a cistern at that location with a team of archaeologists from Western Cultural Resource Management during July.

Once a main water source for fighting fires in the 1870's, the cisterns are round structures, built of brick and mortar and capable of holding up to 9,000 gallons of water. Two were discovered in April while the ReTRAC Project conducted archaeological and soil tests at 16 sites through the project's corridor. One lies under Center St. at Commercial Row - the other, below Virginia St. at Commercial Row.

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Archaeology 101

Evidence of some of the earliest infrastructure in Reno, the cisterns were built by merchants to protect their property. During July, 350 students from the City's Parks, Recreation and Community Services's *Summer of Fun, Summer Discovery* and *Vacation Station* programs, got an up-close and personal view of the cisterns as part of an Archaeology 101 Program created by the ReTRAC Project. The educational program is in conjunction with the Reno Fire Department Museum and

Comstock Archaeology Center at the University of Nevada Reno.

In the 1870's, Reno was little more than tents and wooden structures within a few square blocks of the Truckee River and

Central Pacific Railroad tracks. Fire was one of the biggest concerns to residents and they were absolutely terrified of it. But, technology was lacking and the concept of fire prevention didn't exist. People used kerosene lanterns and coal for heat. The incendiary materials more often than not caused fires rather than provide a light or heat source. The fire of 1879 was started by a spark from a faulty stovepipe. It was fueled by powerful winds and within four hours, the town was laid to waste and the cisterns were dry.

"Buildings often shared a common wall, so when a building caught fire, it quickly spread to adjacent buildings," explains Dan Kastens, director of education with the Comstock Archaeological Center at University of Nevada Reno and archaeology guide to the youngsters.

"I think a program like this does a couple of things," says Jim Arlin, Reno Fire Department Museum director. "It shows the types of devices we had available to use as firefighters



Photo by Ira Mark Gostin

Dig Deep - Archaeologist Leif Christian uncovers part of the cistern while a group of students from the Summer Discovery program look on.



in days gone by. Cisterns are antiquated compared to today's water mains, where fire hydrants are already attached for fire suppression. The bigger mystery for me is, where was the water source for the cistern?"



Reno firefighters demonstrate "drafting" or pulling water from a cistern near Virginia St. in 1875. This view is from Commercial Row looking west. The Engine Company is located approximately where the Eldorado Hotel Casino is now. Courtesy of Reno Fire Department Museum.

According to Arlin, when a fire broke out in the 1870's, firefighters pulled a hand, or horse-drawn steam pumper to a cistern where a hard suction hose was dropped into the water to "draft" or pull water. The pumper itself only held 15-20 gallons, enough to keep it from exploding while en route to a water source. The pumper stayed close to the cistern, which explains why so many were constructed throughout the city.

"A program like this helps to teach kids about the past," says 12-year old Shane Harris, one of the **Summer of Fun** participants. "I learned about what life was like before there was electricity and TV. I didn't know firemen wore helmets made of leather."

"I'm anxious to see what lies at the bottom of cisterns," says Kastens. "In addition to fill, the archaeologist may find garbage that was thrown in the cistern. The value of artifacts is that they don't lie. They tell the true story of how people lived."

With the archaeological analysis weeks and months away, some facts about the cisterns are known. They were eventually filled and covered, though when is unclear. Most likely it came with the advent of fire hydrants in the late 1800s. The cisterns were made from recycled bricks - the remains of bricks from other buildings destroyed in other fires.

Future Dig Doctors

Bringing children into the archaeological mix couldn't

make the State Historic Preservation Office happier.

"We ensure that projects such as ReTRAC consider cultural resources in their planning process," says Rebecca Palmer, historic preservation specialist, State Historic Preservation Office. "We encourage public involvement. I think that anytime one has the opportunity to explain the history of an area to a community, whether it's adults or children, they benefit as well as the archaeologist. After all, how many people knew the cisterns were there until the city began digging?"

Ed Stoner has enjoyed his young on-site viewers. As project manager for the archaeological firm conducting the excavation, he knows all too well that the "dig bug" starts young.

"I was always interested since I was a little kid and read James Michener's *The Source*, about an archaeological excavation in Israel," he says. "You never lose interest because you never do the same thing every day. Anything we uncover has value and information."

Although 11-year old **Summer of Fun** member Matt Merritt says he probably won't be an archaeologist, he found the experience fun and educational.

"I like the stuff they find through the different ages," he says. "It's about how people lived and teaching it to others. By studying what they had then, we can make our technology better."

PROJECT MANAGEMENT FIRM IDENTIFIED BY EVALUATION COMMITTEE



On June 12, Reno's City Council approved an evaluation committee's recommendation to negotiate a contract with the Truckee Meadows ReTRAC Team for management of the ReTRAC (Reno Railroad Corridor Project). The team is a joint venture of DMJM+HARRIS and Moffatt and Nichol Engineers of Long Beach.

Together the team will be responsible for:

- Overall project management
- Cost estimating
- Design engineering
- Request for design-build proposal preparation
- Bid/proposal evaluation and negotiation
- Risk management
- Cost management

One project most commonly associated with the joint venture team is the Alameda Corridor Rail Trench Program. DMJM+HARRIS and Moffatt and Nichol have

managed the design-build program throughout its development, and particularly the 10-mile, mid-corridor trench throughout the Los Angeles area. Though variations in the projects exist, Alameda Corridor's design

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Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura Counties, California; Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad projects; Amtrak and California High-Speed Rail projects; Los Angeles, Oakland and Long Beach port rail projects.

Truckee Meadows ReTRAC Team was one of four proposers who were reviewed by an evaluation committee on May 25, in council chambers at City Hall. Comprised of representatives from Union Pacific Railroad, Nevada Department of Transportation, Washoe County Public Works, City of Reno Public Works, council members, as well as a stakeholder group representative and a non-voting member from the Federal Highway Administration, the committee ranked the Truckee Meadows ReTRAC Team the highest. All four proposers were invited back for an interview on June 6, but two declined.

Photo by Ira Mark Gostin



Under Construction - The Alameda Corridor Project near Los Angeles, Calif., is similar in its design to the proposed ReTRAC Project.

"The project management group must manage the process to complete ReTRAC on time and within budget," says David Levy, project manager and vice president, DMJM+HARRIS. "The very vitality and lifeblood of downtown Reno must be diligently guarded. It's unacceptable to have a 'successful' operation that kills the patient."

concept is very similar to one that the Federal Highway Administration suggested as the best alternative in eliminating railroad grade crossings through Reno.

Other projects that the team have worked on include: Metrolink Commuter Rail System in Los Angeles, Orange,

For more information on the project management team visit: www.dmjmharris.com, or www.moffatnichol.com.

For more information on the ReTRAC project, visit the website at: www.retrac.org, or call Gail Conners, public information officer, at (775) 326-6315.

STAKEHOLDERS RE-GROUP JULY 30



After taking a few months to meet and hash out major concerns and issues with the ReTRAC Project, geographic stakeholder groups will reconvene together on Monday, July 30, from 6-to-9 p.m. at Harrah's Hotel/Casino.

After the initial ReTRAC stakeholder meeting in April, groups were divided into geographic areas: west, east and downtown. Stakeholders are those most directly impacted by the project from Dickerson and Stoker Streets in the west end, to Sutro St. on the east end and from Second to Fourth Streets. In addition, a third group of stakeholders largely comprised of utility and transportation agencies also met. The geographic groups had two main tasks - identify a leader and create a prioritized list of concerns.

The stakeholder leaders are:

West - (from Dickerson and Stoker Ave. to Ralston/Arlington)

Group Leader: **Lloyd Scott**
1530 Mayberry Dr., Reno, 89509
Home: 329-3307
Cell phone: 771-4619
Vice Chair: **Barry Byers**
700 W. 4th St., Reno, 89503
Home: 826-5504, after 5 p.m.

Downtown - (from Ralston/Arlington to Evans Street)

Group Leader: **Dan Edgington - Fitzgeralds**
255 N. Virginia St., Reno, 89501
Work: 785-3395
Vice Chair: **David Wood - Sands Regency**
345 N. Arlington Ave., Reno, 89501
Work: 348-2298

East - (from Evans Street to Sage and Sutro Streets)

Group Leader: **Bob Edmonds**
R Supply Company, Inc.
315 Record St., Reno, 89505
Work: 688-5011
Vice Chair: **Steven Scolari**
RHP Mechanical Systems
1008 E. 4th St., Reno, 89505
322-9434

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STAKEHOLDERS RE-GROUP *(Continued from page 3)*

“For the most part, all three groups have similar issues,” said Gail Conners, public information officer for the ReTRAC Project, and stakeholder group organizer.

The main issues are:

- Establishment of a construction work schedule that minimizes noise and impact
- Creation of a dispute/resolution process
- Coordination of utilities - communication and coordination between agencies and customers
- Expedition of the permit process if a business or property needs to be renovated or relocated because of the project
- Creation of a ad-hoc group for property owners impacted by temporary or permanent property acquisition
- Business interruption minimized and business/property access maximized
- Open and direct communication between all groups
- Mitigation measures equal for all groups, such as utilities, sewer, etc.
- Marketing plan to help businesses remain open and vibrant during construction - “We’re open.”

“Effects of the project that can be mitigated can be addressed in the contract language that will go out to

bid,” says Lloyd Scott, West end leader. “The stakeholder/partnering meetings are a part of this process. This does not mean that the people involved in this process are in favor of or are promoting it. This is about getting what matters and concerns us in the contracts.”

Dan Edgington, Downtown leader concurs. “The partnership program will include goals and objectives related to the entire project. From this information, a list of standards will be derived and given to the City of Reno to be evaluated for construction standards.”

The July 30 meeting will be facilitated by MIG, Inc., the same group that facilitated the first overall stakeholder meeting last April. The focus of the July 30 meeting will be to:

- Review the partnering process and roles of stakeholders
- Share “best practices” among each of the stakeholder groups
- Define community expectations

The next step in the process will be for representatives of each stakeholder group to meet with the project management firm during a lengthy partnership workshop. At the conclusion of workshop, all participants will sign an agreement which stipulates conditions that are written into the bid document for potential contractors.